

## LACDMH Co-Hosts Conference Addressing Latino Mental Health Disparities

By H. Chung So, Public Information Officer II



On Sept. 29, 2016, LACDMH partnered with Pacific Clinics to host a conference focused on “Gaps, Barriers and Solutions for Reducing Mental Health Disparities for Latinos” at the Hilton Los Angeles/San Gabriel Hotel.

The daylong event opened with remarks from Robin Kay, Ph.D., Acting Director of LACDMH, and Luis Garcia, Psy.D., Pacific Clinics’ Vice President of Quality Care, Cultural Diversity and Outcomes. Kay and Garcia discussed the various challenges and creative solutions to delivering quality mental health care for Latino communities.

“We have made considerable progress in reducing mental health disparities in Latino communities, but we need to continue expanding access and utilization of services,” said Garcia.

Kay said that such improvement efforts are already in progress at LACDMH. These include integrating mental health services with primary care, recruiting and developing bilingual and culturally competent care staff and moving treatment “outside our traditional clinic walls” to settings more convenient for clients.

LA County Board Supervisors Hilda Solis and Michael Antonovich attended the conference, and both were praised for improving Latinos’ access to mental health services. This include the promotores program to educate the community about mental health and the homeless outreach and mobile engagement (HOME) program to provide timely evaluation, intervention and advocacy services for homeless populations throughout the county.

The conference’s plenary speakers were Matthew Mock, Ph.D., Professor in John F. Kennedy University’s College of Psychology and Holistic Studies, and Alex Kopelowicz, M.D., Chief of Psychiatry at Olive View-UCLA Medical Center. Mock spoke about the need for contextual awareness and cultural sensitivity when diagnosing and treating mental health issues in Latino populations, and Kopelowicz talked about the importance of family communication and involvement when planning and implementing therapies.

The event’s special guest speaker is don Miguel Ruiz, Jr., a healer and author who talked about his personal journey to become a physical and spiritual guide to others, as well as the need to show compassion and empathy to those who are suffering.

“Look at your clients and recognize their humanity,” said Ruiz.

Additional breakout sessions further tackled behavioral health issues specific to the Latino community. These include recognizing and overcoming stigma associated with a diagnosis, preventing suicide attempts, addressing LGBTQ concerns and how to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

LACDMH presenters for these sessions include Ricardo Mendoza, M.D., Chief Mental Health Psychiatrist, Haydeh Fakhrabadi, Psy.D., Clinical Psychologist and Mireya Segura, L.C.S.W., Psychiatric Social Worker.

The conference’s organizers hope that attendees can take lessons learned from the event to “reduce disparities and integrating mental health, substance abuse services and physical health care for the betterment of our clients.”

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Latino-Americans are 40 percent more likely to suffer from serious psychological distress and half as likely to access mental health services, compared to non-Hispanic

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whites. Further, adolescent Latinas in grades 9 to 12 are 50 percent more likely to attempt suicide compared to white girls in the same age group.

